

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3964

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 4002

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MY

SUBJECT: SABAH: MOHANED NOOR RELEASED; MUSTAPHA ENDMRSES UMNO-USNO
MERGER

REF: A) KUALA LUMPUR 3785; B) KUALA LUMPUR 3547; C) KUALA LUMPUR 1341

1. SUMMARY. BERJAYA SECRETARY GENERAL MOHAMED NOOR WAS RELEASED FROM DETENTION LAST WEEK, PRESUMABLY TO RUN IN AUGUST 7 BY-ELECTIONS FOR FIVE SABAH STATE ASSEMBLY SEATS. TUN MUSTAPHA JULY 12 WON UNANIMOUS APPROVAL FROM AN EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF HIS UNITED SABAH NATIONAL ORGANIZATION (USNO) TO MERGE THE PARTY WITH THE RULING UNITED

MALAYS NATIONAL ORGANIZATION (UMNO). SUGGESTED MERGER, FIRST FLOATED IN EARLY JUNE BY USNO'S DATUK DZULKIFLI, HAS BEEN MET WITH RESOUNDING SILENCE FROM UMNO. RELEASE OF NOOR IS CONCLUSIVE SIGN OF STRONG FEDERAL GOVERNMENT BACK FOR BERJAYA; WHILE MUSTAPHA'S PLOY SEEMS DOOMED TO FAILURE, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF HIS STRONG SUPPORT FOR UMNO RIGHT WING WHICH HAS OPPOSED PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN. END SUMMARY.

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2. SABAH CHIEF MINISTER AND ACTING BERJAYA PARTY PRESIDENT DATUK HARRIS BIN MOHD SALLEH ANNOUNCED JULY 5, ON RETURN FROM ATTENDANCE AT THE UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN KUALA LUMPUR, THAT PARTY'S SECRETARY GENERAL TUAN HAJI MOHD NOOR MANSOR MIGHT BE A CANDIDATE IN AUGUST 7 BY-ELECTIONS TO REPLACE TUM MOHD FUAD STEPHENS AND FOUR OTHERS KILLED IN AIR CRASH JUNE 6. MOHD NOOR WAS DETAINED MARCH 16, 1976, UNDER THE INTERNAL SECURITY ACT (ISA), REPORTEDLY FOR PLOTTING WITH THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT TO ASSASSINATE FORMER CHIEF MINISTER AND UNITED SABAH NATIONAL ORGANIZATION PRESIDENT TUN DATU HAJI MUSTAPHA BIN DATU HARUN. ALTHOUGH MOHD NOOR DID NOT ARRIVE IN KOTA KINABALU JULY 7 AS EXPECTED, AND A CROWD ASSEMBLED TO GREET HIM WAS DISAPPOINTED, HE DID TURN UP IN SABAH JULY 11. THE GOM DID NOT ANNOUNCE THE GROUNDS FOR HIS DETENTION IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA NOR HAS IT EXPLAINED WHY HE WAS RELEASED.

3. COMMENT. RUMORS HAVE IT THAT NOOR WAS RELEASED BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN DETERMINED HE WAS FRAMED BY HIS ALLEGED CO-CONSPIRATOR DATU DARKIS BIN DATU AMIRUL, A NEPHEW OF TUN MUSTAPHA. DARKIS, WHO WAS DETAINED SIX WEEKS BEFORE NOOR, REMAINS IN CUSTODY. WHATEVER THE REASON, MOHD NOOR'S RELEASE IS IMPORTANT TO BERJAYA WHICH NEEDS A PRESTIGIOUS MUSLIM TO RUN IN THE LATE SALLEH SULONG'S OLD DISTRICT OF PAPAR. OBSERVERS ALSO SEE IT AS A CONCLUSIVE SIGN OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR BERJAYA.

4. NEWS PAPERS ANNOUNCED SEVERAL DAYS AGO THAT USNO PRESIDENT TUN MUSTAPHA WOULD MAKE A "MAJOR" SPEECH AT AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE PARTY JULY 12 IN KOTA KINABALU. IN THE EVENT, MUSTAPHA CLAIMED THAT THE OBJECTIVES OF USNO AND THE RULING FEDERAL PARTY UMNO WERE "SIMILAR" AND THEREFORE PROPOSED THAT USNO JOIN UMNO. (THIS PROPOSAL WAS FIRST FLOATED BY MUSTAPHA'S NEPHEW AND HATCHET MAN DATUK HAJI DZULKIFLI ABDUL HAMID, AN USNO VICE PRESIDENT, AFTER USNO WAS FORCED TO ABSTAIN FROM NOMINATING CANDIDATES FOR THE BY-ELECTIONS IN ORDER TO ENTER THE NATIONAL FRONT (REF A). IT WAS DZUL--AS HE IS KNOW--WHO MADE THE FORMAL MOTION AT USNO'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY).

5. COMMENT. AFFILIATION WITH UMNO WOULD BE GREATLY TO USNO'S ADVANTAGE AS IT WOULD MEAN THE RETURN OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT BACKING, REMOVED AFTER MUSTAPHA'S BREAK WITH THE LATE PRIME

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MINISTER RAZAK IN LATE 1974-EARLY 1975. HOWEVER, UMNO SOURCES CLOSE TO PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN HAVE PRIVATELY REJECTED THE IDEA IN CONVERSATIONS WITH EMBOFFS AND, IN VIEW OF MUSTAPHA'S STRONG SUPPORT FOR UMNO RIGHT WING MEMBERS WHO ARE OPPOSED TO DATUK HUSSEIN, WOULD NOT SEEM TO BE IN THE CARDS WHILD HUSSEIN REMAINS AS ACTING UMNO PRESIDENT.

UNDERHILL

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